

# *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*

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## Editorial

### The Ornithological Society of India

Amidst the turmoil going on in Garhwal resulting in a collapse of transport and postal services, the Secretary General Asha Chandola Saklani has managed to send a note on the O S I including names of its Executive Committee, Regional Representatives, as well as a proforma of the membership form reproduced in this Newsletter. I hope many of our readers will decide to join the O S I and help to "gather all the categories of ornithologists on a single platform".

### SACON Identifies priority areas for action

At the workshop held in August '93 on Avian Conservation, SACON identified the species and habitats requiring immediate attention. Our Regional Secretaries must take note of these recommendations and take appropriate action in cooperation with SACON/BNHS wherever possible. I quote from the SACON Newsletter Vol. I No. 1.

"The conservation status of all the critically endangered species and major biogeographic areas of India was presented by field researchers. The five endemic species identified for maximum attention were Jerdon's Courser, lesser florican, great Indian bustard, Narcondam hornbill and Slater's monal, and the five species identified for immediate attention in a global context were, Siberian crane, Bengal florican, greater adjutant stork, whitewinged wood duck and spotbilled pelican. The following additional ten species were identified for conservation attention; the western tragopan, great Indian hornbill, blyth's tragopan, blacknecked crane, malabar pied hornbill, mountain quail,

## **ASIAN WATERFOWL CENSUS – 1995**

**Official Dates : 7th to 22nd January 1995**

### **Addresses of Regional Co-ordinations in India.**

#### **NORTH EAST INDIA**

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#### **KARNATAKA**

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Navbharath Enterprises  
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Birdwatchers Society of Andhra Pradesh  
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HYDERABAD 500 012, Andhra Pradesh, INDIA

*Please send your completed Count data forms  
to the Co-ordinator of your region.*

#### **OTHER REGIONS :**

Participants from other regions should send their  
Count data forms to AWB, HQ in Malaysia.

redfaced malkoha, Andaman teal, large flamingo and great black woodpecker.

The five top priority areas identified for avian conservation were Chilka lake, Point Calimere, Manas Biosphere Reserve, Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve, and Dachigam National Park and the five additional areas recommended were Sri Venkateswara National Park, Corbett National Park, Nicobar Islands, and Anamalai Hills."

### Review of 1994, and nomenclature problems

As 1994 comes to an end, I must attempt an assessment of our Newsletter. Is it progressing, retreating or static? When it started in December 1959, we had a Founder group of about 25 people, and now I believe we have around 800 subscribers. Not an adequate increase over a period of 40 years, but the trend is satisfactory, and that is all that can be said at the moment.

The quality of the articles has improved greatly and we now have knowledgeable birdwatchers whose articles would do credit to any publication. The Newsletter members have also been able to record sightings of species hitherto unknown in certain areas. You will recall the notes by Prakash Gole on birds of the western coast, and by Anwaruddin Choudhury about birds in the north eastern region.

Interest in birdwatching is growing rapidly and from time to time someone writes to say that he/she has become interested in birds and likes the Newsletter. Some amateurs are rather tiresome and make difficult demands like wanting a complete list of the birds of their area, a list of reference books, guidelines about how to go about it, and so on. In future I will pass these requests on to the Regional Editors.

While on this theme I must report on a recent note sent by the Coimbatore Zoological Park & Conservation Centre on "Birdwatching, a Tool for Environmental Education". The attempt is to make children look at birds in a systematic way and keep a "diary.... of bird occurrence within the school area". They are encouraged to observe flight patterns, breeding behaviour, food habits, collecting pellets to determine the nature of their diet, study the structure of nests. "The materials used to make nests can be identified by carefully dissecting old nests". I hope this project will receive wide publicity and will be replicated in other schools. Our readers could contact Brij Kishor Gupta at this Centre and introduce this idea in schools with which they are connected.

For me, editing the usable material, re-writing whole sections sometimes, to make the meaning clear is time consuming. I would like to point out that many articles received are very carelessly written. There are a number of unnecessary spelling mistakes and there is a universal tendency among amateurs to be too repetitive. The use of double adjectives to describe anything should be avoided. An economy of words would result in more effective and a more readable piece. So after writing the article try and see how many superfluous words can be got rid of. But remember that prepositions in the right place are necessary. Don't economise on them.

During the last year a whole lot of check-lists have been received. These are organised according to Families - a great improvement over earlier years when there was a jumble of names with a crow and a duck side by side. But what I would like to have interspersed within these check-lists are interesting accounts about the behaviour of at least some of the more prominent birds listed. An undiluted check-list is like whisky without soda - just too strong.

The great event of the year was the ten year Index (1980-1991) published in the May-June issue. One has to applaud Aasheesh Pittie for this effort which brings back old issues to life. Recently I wanted information on the yellow-throated bulbul and I was able to retrieve two very useful articles as a result of the Pittie index.

One problem which needs to be solved is about the common names of birds. I believe we discussed this many years ago but I have forgotten the outcome. If you see page 102 of the Sept/Oct 94 issue you will find (as the Editor finds to his dismay) the same birds on the same page spelt in different ways : Brown dipper and Brown Dipper; Rufous Turtle Dove and Rufous Turtle dove; and many more. But apart from these annoying inconsistencies which can be corrected, I would like to suggest that we follow the practice of using hyphens for compound names. Not Redvented Bulbul but Red-vented Bulbul, or better still red-vented bulbul. R.E. Hawkins, the late Editor of the Oxford University Press was a firm believer in hyphens, and there has never been a more competent Editor. So from 1995 let us use the lower case for the English names of birds, and hyphens wherever appropriate. In this connection see the letter by Dr. Joseph George in the correspondence section. Unknown to most readers he has been of invaluable assistance in proof reading the Newsletter. He feels that capitals should continue to be used for common English names. Perhaps we can try the lower case in some of the forthcoming issues and see whether there are too many "singing larks" which cause a problem.

Finally, one is very encouraged to see so many birdwatching societies fighting for the preservation of our natural world. We cannot over-emphasise the fact that if we plan our future keeping the interest of birds in mind, we will have done well for ourselves. For birds are the most sensitive indicators of the ecological health of our environment.

### The Asian Waterfowl Census 1987-91

In the last Newsletter of Sept/Oct 1994, I had referred to the Asian Waterfowl Census 1987-91. I offered to write a review for the current issue, but for the moment the best I can do is to reproduce the letters received from the Asian Wetland Bureau which appear in the correspondence section.

### Birding in Bangalore

One is surprised that in spite of the rampant development taking place, there are still open areas left where birds survive under natural conditions. One such place is Agram which is in charge of the Army. Since it adjoins the airport perhaps it will always remain free from high rise buildings

and retain its present rural character. At the moment it is the home of 500 milch cattle and there are extensive meadows of grassland and jowar fields. The generally open landscape has a few avenues of rain trees, and altogether it is a delightful area for getting a feel of the country.

On 11th December, during my morning ride on horseback, I saw two birds of prey far away on telegraph posts. I could not get close enough to identify them, and hoping that they were location specific, went again in the afternoon and discovered that they were Brahminy kites. They treated me to an exciting courtship display – something which I had never seen before. The next day I spent a couple of hours wandering around and enjoyed myself thoroughly. A pair of black-winged kites flew back and forth in their laboured fashion and then parachuted down in the hope of landing on prey but without success. There was a harrier, brown with a white rump, and every time I see a harrier I am reminded of the beautiful description about the flight of this bird by Eha in his *Common Birds of India*. I quote ... "Long-winged and light-bodied, it skims along the grass and skirts the bush, dips to the hollow and rises to the mound, as if it knew some charm to cancel the laws of gravitation". G M Henry in his *A Guide to the Birds of Ceylon* (p.232) has marvellous illustrations of 4 species of harriers, male &

female and I can only guess that the bird I saw was a female Montagu from its colour and white rump. On a rain tree in the distance was I think a honey buzzard. Its pigeon-like head and the markings under the wing seen during its flight prompts me to this conclusion but I may be wrong.

A bird which pleased me very much was the collared bush chat - a migrant which I have not seen for many years. It is extraordinary how every bird of a particular species has the same pattern of behaviour. Past memories of this bird was identical with what I saw - landing on a shrub, moving its tail up and down and cocking its head to one side with a naughty gleam in its eye. I am surprised that there are no pied bush chats in those grounds. Is it because the migrants keep the locals away? Then there were skylarks, streaked fantail warblers, a large number of cattle egrets (no other egrets), spotted doves and shikra. All the swallows were the migrants, common swallows. Their flight "swift and graceful – a few rapid wing strokes followed by a long glide".

I hope Agram will retain its pleasant rural character but members of the Birdwatchers Field Club of Bangalore should perhaps make a detailed survey here, and send a note to the Army informing them of the treasure they possess, and the pleasure it gives to non combatants.



## Report on XXI International Ornithological Congress, August 20 - 25, 1994, Vienna

ASHA CHANDOLA-SAKLANI, HNB Garhwal University, Srinagar, Garhwal

The XXI Congress was held in the Hofburg, Vienna, the former palace of the Austrian-Hungarian Emperors and the seat of Hapsburg dynasty up to 1918. The deliberations were carried out in rooms so steeped in history that while listening to the state-of-the-art lectures on recent developments in Ornithology and concentrating on the projected slides in the lush dim halls you felt the monarchs and emperors breathing down your neck! Especially in the Zeremoniensaal, the throne room for the monarch with 26 chandeliers and 1300 lights (formerly candles) where also Napoleon courted the emperor's daughter, the Rittersaal where Maria Theresa was baptised in 1717, and so on so forth. It would be in keeping with this strong sense of history to mention that the first Int. Ornithol. Congress was also held in Vienna hundred and ten years ago in 1884.

One of the most striking and beautiful features of the International Ornithological Congresses for me, and which was very much in evidence in this Congress too, is the endearing way hardboiled science mixes with and shares the naivette and sheer pleasure of birdwatching. (We at OSI are striving for it!) Actually come to think of it, it is not surprising. After all science has its genesis in simple questions. The better the science the simpler it gets and is of no use if it can not be conceptualised within the general framework of life around us.

The XXI Int. Ornithol. Cong. opened with a reception on 20th evening in the Arcades of the University. The occasion was marked by a warm bonhomie with friends and acquaintances hailing each other. Soon after refreshments people settled down on the lawns to an enchanting evening of String Quartet and Piano Concert with works from Mozart, Dvorak, Bach, Schubert, Chopin, Stravinsky and Toch.

About 1500 delegates from all over the world participated.

**BIRD WATCHING :** Frankly speaking, to my Indian (Himalayan?) eyes accustomed to sighting scores of birds at the turn of the bend, a pigeon or a blue tit offers no excitement in Europe especially if you have limited time. The best way was to take some of the excursions. A variety of pre- and post-Congress excursions ranging from single day to 2-week programs were organised with guides - most of them to avian habitats offering a fantastic opportunity to be acquainted with European habitats, on several occasions (before my son arrived!) while driving along or boating in the Danube (helped by my European ornithologist friends and their families) I got to see the water birds in reeds, riverine forests and sea coast (white-tailed eagle, pelicans, pygmy cormorant, ibis, herons and terns). I vividly remember the opportunities I had of sighting the montane fauna while travelling in the Alps through subalpine forest, meadows, cliffs, streams and glaciers (griffon vulture, golden eagle,

crag martin, nutcracker, Alpine chough, wallcreeper, dipper and accentor). This, thank heavens, was after my initiation into birdwatching by Madhav Gadgil in 1978 in the environs of the School of Biosciences, Madurai!

**FILMS :** The other best alternative to birdwatching at the Congress was films of which there were plenty. About 50 films from all over the world were shown which offered a good opportunity to get in touch with the Austrian bird fauna as well as seasonal and regional aspects of Austria and its people.

**ACADEMIC SESSIONS :** The academic sessions were spread over five full days of hectic activity commencing with a plenary at 08:00 hrs and ending with a lecture at 20:00 hrs. In all ten Plenary lectures, 54 Symposia (each comprising 5-6 invited state-of-the-art lectures, 300 in all), and 69 Round Tables (each comprising 8-10 invited speakers) and about 700 short communications (posters) were organised. At a given time 5-6 Symposia and 8-10 Round Tables were running parallelly. The presentations were grouped into six major thematic categories viz., Gen. Biology, Systematics & Evolution, Morphology & Physiology, Behaviour, Ecology, Applied Ornithology & Conservation.

Obviously it is extremely difficult to highlight within this short space all the developments presented at a Conference composed of so many independent units and, therefore, I shall only highlight the plenary lectures and the contribution of Indian participants in this issue of the Newsletter hopefully followed by short accounts of what transpired in some selected symposia/round tables e.g. in the Themes Behaviour, Ecology & Conservation. Personally I found the Round Tables conducted in relatively informal ambience extremely exciting. This gathering of Ornithologists was highly successful in exchange of scientific results and ideas for future research and provided a common forum for interaction among scientists working in entirely different disciplines of Ornithology. Considering that more than 98% of papers presented at the International Ornithological Congresses so far, have been from the temperate zone despite the fact that 85% of birds reside in the tropics the most remarkable development resulting from this Congress for me was the new trend towards the tropics as manifested by the presentations.

## PLENARIES

The Presidential address was delivered by Christofer Perrins of Oxford University, a renowned field ornithologist who spoke on Egg Production in Birds. From extensive field studies on the great tit, *Parus major* he presented data indicating that calcium availability may limit egg production. Also higher temperature, low breeding densities of bird populations and adequate food supply were identified as the factors favouring production of larger eggs which have a much greater hatching, fledgeling and survival success. Other correlates of egg-size, such as body-size of the laying female and heritability were discussed.

## Contribution of Indian Participants

The following delegates from India participated :

1. Manjit Dhindsa, Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana. He presented two posters with slides and was an invited speaker in the Round Table on Reproduction in Birds of the Tropics.  
Breeding Ecology of the common myna in nest boxes and its comparison with natural nests.  
(with S.K. Dhanda) in the Theme, Ecology – Nesting.  
– A method for estimating parakeet damage to maize (with H.K. Saini) in the Theme, Applied Ornithology.
2. Harjit K. Saini, Punjab University, Ludhiana. She presented a poster with slides entitled : Sexual size dimorphism in *Columba livia* and sex determination by discrimination analysis (with M.S. Dhindsa) in the Theme, Morphology & Physiology.
3. D.N. Mathews, Calicut University, Kerala, presented a poster with slides entitled : Conservation of terns *Sterna fuscata* and *Anous stolidus* in Lakshdweep (with Tara Gandhi & George Mathew).
4. S.A. Hussain, and Taej Mundkar of the Asian Wetland Bureau, Malaysia and Asha Chandola Saklani from HNB Garhwal University participated.



## Birdwatchers' Paradise Near Bombay

S. CHANDRASEKARAN, S. JAYATHEERTHAN, and ULHAS PARALKAR from Bombay

Dativare is a small fishing hamlet on the bank of Arnala, a better known fishing village on the coast near Bombay. These places are close to Virar, a suburb of Bombay. The Arabian Sea enters between these two fishing ports and forms a bay which peters out into a channel at Vaitarna, a station on the train route to Ahmedabad. Of course, there are many sub-channels running in between the nearby villages.

This bay and the natural shoreline of Dativare which extends up to 2 km provides an ideal habitat for many migratory birds. The habitat is enhanced by the regular tidal action which submerges and exposes the mudflats. Dativare is an ideal location and habitat attracting winter migrants

every year. In fact our observations have even established an overwintering pattern among the migratory waterfowl. We have seen waders in breeding plumage even in June.

Our observations since November 1993, has resulted in many interesting sightings of birds like the pallid owl, short-eared owl, tawny eagle, caspian plover. In fact, many fellow birdwatchers from BNHS and other groups find these visits to Dativare very interesting. Unfortunately we have seen some poaching which needs to be checked.

Coming to the special attraction of this place, and the popularity it has gained among birdwatchers, a special





mention needs to be made about the greater flamingos (*Phoenicopterus roseus*), observed here from the middle of September to almost the middle of June, which is a challenge for Naturalists as it defies the theory of migration. A study by BNHS may give a clue to this phenomenon.

We are enclosing a checklist of the birds we have seen during our regular visits to Dativare this year. Though it is extensive it is not exhaustive, since much of the habitat is yet to be thoroughly surveyed.

#### Grebes

Little grebe *Podiceps ruficollis*

#### Cormorants, Darter

Indian shag *Phalacrocorax fuscicollis*

Little cormorant *Phalacrocorax niger*

#### Hérons, Egrets, Bitterns

Eastern grey heron *Ardea cinerea*

Pond heron or paddy bird *Ardeola grayii*

Cattle egret *Bubulcus ibis*

Large egret *Egretta alba*

Smaller egret *Egretta intermedia*

Little egret *Egretta garzetta*

Indian reet heron *Egretta gularis*

Night heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*

#### Ibises, Spoonbill

Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*

#### Flamingos

Flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus*

Lesser flamingo *Phoeniconaias minor*

#### Ducks, Geese, Swans

Ruddy shelduck, brahminy duck *Tadorna ferruginea*

Pintail *Anas acuta*

Common teal *Anas crecca crecca*

Garganey *Anas querquedula*

#### Birds of Prey, Vultures

Blackwinged kite *Elanus caeruleus*

Pariah kite *Milvus migrans*

Brahminy kite *Haliastur indus*

Indian shikra *Accipiter badius*

Crested hawk-eagle *Spizaetus cirrhatus*

Tawny eagle *Aquila rapax*

Indian whitebacked vulture *Gyps bengalensis*

Pale harrier *Circus macrourus*

Marsh harrier *Circus aeruginosus*

Crested serpent eagle *Spilornis cheela*

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*

#### Partridges, Quails, Spurfowl

Painted partridge *Francolinus pictus*

Grey partridge *Francolinus pondicerianus*

#### Rails, Crakes, Coot

Coot *Fulica atra*

#### Oystercatchers, Plovers

Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*

Redwattled lapwing *Vanellus indicus*

Yellow wattled lapwing *Vanellus malabaricus*

Grey plover *Pluvialis squatarola*

Eastern golden plover *Pluvialis dominica*

Large sandplover *Charadrius leschenaultii*

Kentish plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*

Lesser sand plover *Charadrius mongolus*

Little ringed plover *Charadrius dubius*

#### Curlews, Sandpipers, Snipe

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*

Curlew *Numenius arquata*

Blacktailed godwit *Limosa limosa*

Common redshank *Tringa totanus*

Marsh sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis*

Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

Green sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*

Wood sandpiper *Tringa glareola*

Terek sandpiper *Tringa terek*

Common sandpiper *Tringa hypoleucos*

Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*

Sanderling *Calidris albus*

Little stint *Calidris minutus*

Dunlin *Calidris alpinus*

Curlew sandpiper *Calidris testaceus*

Crab plover *Dromas ardeola*

#### Gulls, Terns

Lesser blackbacked gull *Larus fuscus*

Great blackheaded gull *Larus ichthyaeus*

Brownheaded gull *Larus brunnecephalus*

Blackheaded gull *Larus ridibundus*

Whiskered tern *Chlidonias hybrida*

Gullbilled tern *Gelochelidon nilotica*

Caspian tern *Hydroprogne caspia*

Little tern *Sterna albitrons*

Indian river tern *Sterna aurantia*

#### Pigeons, Doves

Blue rock pigeon *Columba livia*

Spotted dove *Streptopelia chinensis*

Little brown dove *Streptopelia senegalensis*

#### Cuckoos

Hawk-cuckoo or brainfever bird *Cuculus varius*

Koel *Eudynamis scolopacea*



**Crow-pheasant or coucal**  
**Indian plaintive cuckoo**

*Centropus sinensis*  
*Cacomantis merulinus*

#### Parakeets, Lorikeet

**Raseringed parakeet** *Psittacula krameri*

#### Owls

**Striated or pallid scops owl** *Otus brucei*  
**Spotted owl** *Athene brama*  
**Shorteared owl** *Asio flammeus*

#### Swifts

**House swift** *Apus affinis*  
**Palm swift** *Cypsiurus parvus*

#### Kingfishers

**Common kingfisher** *Alcedo atthis*  
**Whitebreasted kingfisher** *Halcyon smyrnensis*  
**Blackcapped kingfisher** *Halcyon pileata*

#### Bee-eaters

**Blue cheeked bee-eater** *Merops superciliosus*  
**Green bee-eater** *Merops orientalis*

#### Rollers, Hoopoes

**Indian hoopoe** *Upupa epops*

#### Barbets, Wryneck

**Redwinged bush lark** *Megalaima haemacephala*  
**Syke's crested lark** *Galerida deva*  
**Eastern skylark** *Alauda gulgula*

#### Martins, Swallows

**Dusky crag martin** *Hirundo concolor*  
**Common swallow** *Hirundo rustica*  
**Wiretailed swallow** *Hirundo smithii*  
**Red-rumped swallow** *Hirundo daurica*

#### Shrikes

**Rufousbacked shrike** *Lanius schach*  
**Baybacked shrike** *Lanius vittatus*

#### Orioles

**Golden oriole** *Oriolus oriolus*

#### Drongos, Swallow-shrike

**King crow or black drongo** *Dicrurus adsimilis*  
**Grey or ashy drongo** *Dicrurus leucophaeus*

#### Mynas, Starlings

**Blackheaded or brahminy myna** *Sturnus pagodarum*

**Rasy pastor**

**Common myna**

*Sturnus roseus*

*Acridotheres tristis*

#### Tree-pie, Crows

**House crow** *Corvus splendens*  
**Jungle crow** *Corvus macrorhynchos*

#### Cuckoo-shrikes

**Large cuckoo-shrike** *Coracina navaehollandiae*

#### Ioras

**Iora** *Aegithina tiphia*

#### Bulbuls

**Redvented bulbul** *Pycnonotus cafer*  
**Redwhiskered bulbul** *Pycnonotus jocosus*

#### Babblers

**Common babbler** *Turdoides caudatus*

#### Warblers

**Franklin's wren-warbler** *Prinia hodgsonii*  
**Ashy wren-warbler** *Prinia socialis*  
**Tailor bird** *Orthotomus sutorius*  
**Blythe's reed warbler** *Acrocephalus dumetorum*  
**Orphean warbler** *Sylvia hortensis*

#### Chats, Thrushes

**Bluthroat** *Erithacus svecicus*  
**Magpie robin** *Copsychus saularis*  
**Resident pied bushchat** *Saxicola caprata*  
**Desert chat or desert wheatear** *Oenanthe deserti*

#### Pipits

**Tree pipit** *Anthus trivialis*

#### Wagtails

**Pied or white wagtail** *Motacilla alba*

#### Flowerpeckers, Sunbirds

**Tickell's flowerpecker** *Dicaeum erythrorhynchos*  
**Purplerumped sunbird** *Nectarinia zeylonica*  
**Loten's sunbird** *Nectarinia lotenia*  
**Purple sunbird** *Nectarinia asiatica*

#### Sparrows, Weaver Birds

**House sparrow** *Passer domesticus*  
**Yellowthroated sparrow** *Petronia xanthocollis*  
**Baya or weaver bird** *Ploceus philippinus*  
**Whitethroated munia** *Lonchura malabarica*







## Effects of Certain Agroforestry Trees on Avian Biodiversity

Dr. S. THIRUMURTHI and Prof. R. ANNAMALAI, Forest College and Research Institute, Mettupalayam 641 301

Under agroforestry and social forestry schemes, tree species are recommended without any scientific consideration about their ecological effects. Since the trees support a variety of bird life, it would be desirable to select species which support a diverse population of birds. A study has been conducted at the Forest College and Research Institute, Mettupalayam and environs to identify the birds associated with certain species of trees currently recommended for agroforestry planting in the State of Tamilnadu. Care was taken to account only for the birds coming to these trees for feeding. Three categories were identified viz., frugivorous, insectivorous and nectarivorous. Occasional nest builders and roosters were not taken into consideration. The following table lists the number of species under these classes associated with 12 species of agroforestry trees.

It becomes clear from the results that eucalyptus, silver oak, *Simaruba glauca* and casuarina could not support bird life and are not eligible for conservation oriented afforestation. Except two or three species of sunbirds others have no food materials provided by these trees. Even though casuarina trees offer some mealy bugs, bagworms and weevils to insectivorous birds, it is highly limited; and young trees and nursery materials have pest problems. Hence as far as possible, these trees may be avoided for agroforestry planting since the biomass production without ecological consideration will be counter productive in the forest ecosystems. It should be borne in mind that because of the tea-silver oak plantation system in the Nilgiris the bird life has been greatly reduced since both these species do not support birds. Vast expanses of eucalyptus and wattle plantations in Tamilnadu also bear a grim picture for the same reason. Loss in bird activity also increases the pest problems in adjoining areas of cultivated ecosystems

prompted by the disappearance of insectivorous birds. Introduction of exotic trees like *Simaruba glauca* under irrigated agroforestry also needs to be reviewed.

Cashew, ailanthus, *Inga dulce*, teak, silk cotton, neem and moringa offer favourable conditions for a variety of birds. The presence of a large number of insectivores here also help in the natural management of the pests attacking cultivated crops grown under the Integrated Farming System (IFS) with agroforestry as a major component. The careful management of frugivorous birds particularly in cashew plantations should be a part of any afforestation programme.

### Effects of certain agroforestry trees on avian biodiversity

Name of the tree	No. of bird species associated with tree		
	Insectivorous	Frugivorous	Nectarivorous
1. Cashew*	11	13	-
2. Eucalyptus+	-	-	3
3. Ailanthus*	21	3	2
4. Teak*	15	-	-
5. Casuarina+	4	-	-
6. Silver oak+	-	-	-
7. <i>Inga dulce</i> *	6	20	3
8. <i>Simaruba glauca</i>	+	-	2
9. Silk cotton*	7	-	10
10. <i>Acacia nilotica</i>	9	-	3
11. Neem*	6	16	-
12. Moringa*	12	3	3

(\*) Trees suitable for augmenting bird population.

(+) Trees adversely affecting bird populations



## Nesting Habits of House Sparrow and a Nesting Colony of Cliff Swallows in Jaipur District

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I read with great interest the observations of J.K. Tiwari on the unusual nesting behaviour of house sparrow (Newsletter for Birdwatchers, Vol. 33, No. 3, May-June 1993, Page 52). In Jaipur house sparrows *Passer domesticus* breed mainly from February to June. These birds also breed in small numbers during September and October. Their nesting activity is absent at other times of the year. During the peak breeding season every possible nesting site is occupied and some even make their nests in trees.

In April 1993, I saw two nests in a large dense tree of *Dalbergia sissoo* near a tea shop. Customers gather under this tree to sip tea. The nests were about 5 metres apart. These nests were large, globular, untidy heaps of grass. The nests were domed with a side entrance. The sparrows successfully raised their families in both the nests.

Another nest was located during September 1993 in a small mulberry tree with dense foliage. This nest was small

12 x 15 cm, globular with a side entrance near the upper end. It was located near the centre of the canopy. This nest was later on abandoned.

On 12 September 1993, a large colony of cliff swallow *Hirundo fluvicola* consisting of about 120 nests was noticed

under a masonry arch of Chhapparwada dam near Dudu in Jaipur district. Swallows were busy hawking insects and feeding their young ones. I noticed that six of the nests were occupied by house sparrows.



## Community Bathing of House Sparrows

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On 22nd June 1994, I noted community bathing by house sparrows *Passer domesticus* at Denkanikota of Dharmapuri district of Tamil Nadu. There were more than fifty sparrows, both males and females, waiting for their turn to bathe in a small pool on the main road.

The time was around 1.00 p.m. (noon). The sparrows plunged into the water and shook vigorously. At any one time only two sparrows took a bath which lasted for approximately five minutes. No specific pattern could be observed about the ratio of males and females per bath. This bathing activity

lasted for more than two hours on a busy road. After taking their bath each sparrow waited outside the pool and basked in the sun.

All the sparrows waited outside till the last one finished its bath. Afterwards all the sparrows went to the other side of the road where there was dry, fine sand. It was interesting to watch the sparrows taking a sand bath, immediately after having wetted themselves in water. They seem to need two baths to maintain their feathers in good condition.



## Notes on Senegal Dove, Jungle Crow and Redvented Bulbul

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### a) Ground Nesting by Senegal Dove

The Senegal dove (*Streptopelia senegalensis*) builds its nest in *Euphorbia* or in other open bushes or in a stunted date palm *Phoenix sylvestris*. (Ali & Ripley, 1983, Handbook of Birds).

During the summer of 1991, while I was inspecting forestry works on a hill at World Forestry Arboretum, Jaipur, I came across a ground nest of a Senegal dove with two eggs. It was placed near a single stemmed seedling of *Euphorbia nereifolia* towards uphill-side. A similar nest was seen on 11.6.1994 at "Bolna Parda Hill" near Kankarmala Reserve Forest Block in Udaipur district. A ground nest of a Senegal dove with two eggs was found near the root-zone of a bushy *Nyctanthes arborescens* again understandably on the uphill side to prevent the eggs from sliding down.

It was amazing that only ten metres away from the dove's nest, an Indian python (*Python molurus*) was present in a burrow and was incubating eggs.

### b) Strange Behaviour of a Jungle Crow

On 23.4.1994, in Oda, Udaipur district, I observed a jungle crow *Corvus macrorhynchos* carrying a medium sized leaf in its bill. When it dropped the leaf and flew away I picked it up for identification. It was a dry leaf of *Ficus benghalensis*.

What could be the use of a *Ficus* leaf to a jungle crow? Only twigs and sticks are used in nest making (Ali & Ripley, 1983). Also for lining the nests, relatively soft fibres are used and not dried leaves.

Probably big sized lamina like leaves may be used as cover to protect 'stored food'. The food storing behaviour in jungle crow has been observed by Natrajan (1992) and Sharma (in press). They have observed crows covering vegetative and non-vegetative food.

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### A Redvented Bulbul with a malformed Bill Feeding on Moths

On the morning of 11.7.1994, at Jhadol in Udaipur district, I found many birds, redvented bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*), magpie robin (*Copsychus saularis*), jungle babbler (*Turdoides striatus*), house sparrow (*Passer domesticus*), common myna (*Acridotheres tristis*), feeding on moths,

congregated during the night around the electric bulb in the verandah. They were all devouring the moths. Each bird caught hold of the moth and then removed the wings by jerks before devouring it. While the 'feast' was on, a redvented bulbul with a malformed bill joined the group. Its lower

mandible was normal but the upper was upwardly curved. Due to this structural fault the tips of both the mandibles were open at the ends and they could not catch a moth firmly. Hence it was swallowing the moths without removing their wings.



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## Checklist of Birds of Biratnagar

**B**iratnagar (Lat. N 26° 29', Long E 87° 16', alt 72 m) is the second largest town of the country. It stretches over an area of 760 sq. km. Subtropical humid climate prevails here. It is a green town bordered by Singia river in the east, Kesalya river in the west, Tankisinwari G.B.S. in the north and Budhanagar G.B.S. and Jogbani (Bihar) in the South. The principal tree of Biratnagar is sisso *Dalbergia sisso*, besides this there are several kind of trees, herbs and shrubs which offer food and shelter to the avifauna. As there are small ponds, small patches of wet land, birds of different habits and habitats can be observed here throughout the year excepting migratory birds.

Though in Birds of Nepal. With Reference To Kashmir and Sikkim by Robert L. Fleming, Sr. and Jr., mention about Birds of Biratnagar by Andrew and Claudea Cassels, there is no literature about birds of Biratnagar, published separately. The present report is the record of three years' (June 1991-June 1994) regular observations. The present checklist includes 86 species of birds.

### Family : Pelecanidae

1. Little cormorant *Phalacrocorax niger*

### Family : Ardeidae

2. Pond heron *Ardeola grayii*
3. Night heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*
4. Cattle egret *Bubulcus ibis*
5. Little egret *Egretta garzetta*
6. Intermediate egret *Egretta intermedia*

### Family : Ciconiidae

7. Open-billed stork *Anastomus oscitans*
8. Lesser Adjutant stork *Leptoptilos dubius*
9. White necked stork *Ciconia episcopus*

### Family : Threskiornithidae

10. Black ibis *Pseudibis papillosa*

### Family : Accipitridae

11. Indian griffon *Gyps indicus*
13. Eurasian griffon *Gyps fulvus*
14. Black kite *Milvus migrans*
15. Pied harrier *Circus melanoleucos*



### Family : Rallidae

16. Whitebreasted water hen *Amaurornis phoenicurus*

### Family : Charadriidae

17. Little ring plover *Charadrius dubius*
18. Common sand-piper *Tringa hypoleucos*
19. Green shank *Tringa nebularia*
20. Stone curlew *Burhinus oedipnemos*

### Family : Rostratulidae

21. Fantail snipe *Capella gallinago*

### Family : Columbidae

22. Indian ring dove *Streptopelia decaocto*
23. Spotted dove *Streptopelia chinensis*
24. Red turtle dove *Streptopelia tranquebarica*

### Family : Psittacidae

25. Roseringed parakeet *Psittacula krameri*

### Family : Cuculidae

26. Koel cuckoo *Eudynamis scolopacea*
27. Common hawk-cuckoo *Cuculus varius*
28. Pied crested cuckoo *Clamator jacobinus*
29. Large coucal (crow pheasant) *Centropus sinensis*

### Family : Strigidae

30. Spotted owl *Athene brama*

### Family : Apodidae

31. House swift *Apus affinis*
32. Palm swift *Cypsiurus parvus*



### Family : Alcedinidae

33. Blue-eared kingfisher *Alcedo meninting*
34. Whitebreasted kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis*
35. Storkbilled kingfisher *Pelargopsis capensis*
36. Small pied kingfisher *Ceryle rudis*
37. Eurasian kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*

### Family : Meropidae

38. Bluetailed bee-eater *Merops philippinus*
39. Green bee-eater *Merops orientalis*

### Family : Coraciidae

40. Indian roller *Coracias benghalensis*

### Family : Upupidae

41. Hoopoe *Upupa epops*

**Family : Capitonidae**

42. Crimsonbreasted barbet *Megalaima haemacephala*  
 43. Bluethroated barbet *Megalaima asiatica*  
 44. Blue-eared barbet *Megalaima australis*

**Family : Picidae**

45. Lesser golden-backed woodpecker *Dinopium benghalense*  
 46. Brown-crowned pigmy woodpecker *Dendrocopus nanus*

**Family : Alaudidae**

47. Bush lark *Mirafra assamica*

**Family : Irenidae**

48. Black-headed shrike *Lanius schach*  
 49. Brown shrike *Lanius cristatus*

**Family : Oriolidae**

50. Golden oriole *Oriolus oriolus*  
 51. Black-headed oriole *Oriolus xanthornus*

**Family : Dicruridae**

52. Black drongo *Dicrurus adsimilis*  
 53. Ashy drongo *Dicrurus leucophaeus*

**Family : Sturnidae**

54. Common myna *Acridotheres tristis*  
 55. Bank myna *Acridotheres ginginianus*  
 56. Jungle myna *Acridotheres fuscus*  
 57. Pied myna *Stumus contra*  
 58. Grey-headed myna *Stumus malabaricus*

**Family : Corvidae**

59. House crow *Corvus splendens*  
 60. Jungle crow *Corvus macrorhynchos*  
 61. Indian tree pie *Dendrocitta vagabunda*

**Family : Campephagidae**

62. Large cuckoo-shrike *Coracina novaehollandiae*

**Family : Pycnonotidae**

63. Red-vented bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer*  
 64. Red-whiskered bulbul *Pycnonotus jocosus*  
 65. Jungle babbler *Turdoides striatus*

66. Large grey babbler *Turdoides malcolmi*

**Family : Muscicapidae**

67. Red-breasted flycatcher *Muscicapa parva*  
 68. Grey-headed flycatcher *Culicicapa ceylonensis*  
 69. Paradise flycatcher *Terpsiphone paradisi*  
 70. White-throated flycatcher *Rhipidura albicollis*  
 71. Clamorous reed warbler *Acrocephalus stentoreus*  
 72. Yellow-throated leaf warbler *Phylloscopus cantator*  
 73. Dusky leaf warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus*  
 74. Blue throat *Erithacus svecicus*  
 75. Magpie robin *Copsychus saularis*

**Family : Motacillidae**

76. Pied wagtail greybacked form *Motacilla Maderaspatensis*  
 77. Yellow-headed wagtail *Motacilla citreola*  
 78. Pied wagtail black-backed form  
 79. Paddyfield pipit *Anthus novaeseelandiae*

**Family : Nectariniidae**

80. Purple sunbird *Nectarinia asiatica*

**Family : Ploceidae**

81. House sparrow *Passer domesticus*  
 82. Spotted munia *Lonchura puntalata*  
 83. Black-headed munia *Lonchura malacca*  
 84. Baya weaver *Ploceus philippinus*

**Family : Emberizidae**

85. Yellow-breasted bunting *Emberiza aureola*

**Family : Sylviidae**

86. Tailor bird *Orthotomus sutorius*

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## Nest Material Foraging Among Kites

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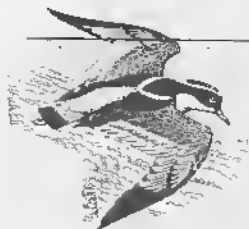
Mangalore town has received a record rainfall of 4,500mm this year. The result has been a fierce competition for suitable nesting material, among those species which need dry twigs for bulding their nests. Dr. Arunachalam Kumar describes the struggle. (Editor)

No resident population of aves has fascinated me more than the common pariah kite *Milvus migrans*. Fed on garbage and vermin the kites have attained unbelievable numbers in our city. In September, these freewheeling raptors, punctuate the sky with their high pitched calls :

followed by the horse-like 'neighs' that accompany coupling. Successful ovulation, and noisy copulation, must lead to brood responsibility. However nesting material is in short supply, for the high humidity and heavy rain make every dry twig feel and look like a wet thong. The city kites now do something odd.. they fly pell-mell, helter skelter through branch and bower in dense patches of the more wooded parts of town. This seemingly bizarre aerial sortie does two things (a) it leaves a very sore bird (b) the random flight path loosens and dislodges many dry twigs from the trees.

Soreness notwithstanding, the kites swoop back clutching the tumbling twigs in their talons. Bruised wings, but dry nests. What a show! Sadly though, the kites have, in addition to me, one other less altruistic admirer and fan... the cursed *Corvus splendens*. Quick in pursuit of the crashing kite, the crow follows, picking up the twigs faster than the poor kite

can turn back and swoop towards them. A few wily ones rifle the kite's nest for choice sticks and sprigs. Maternal instinct makes strange demands, and here invention is necessitated by motherhood. The next time anyone refers to a dim-wit as bird-brained, I am inviting him to Mangalore to witness the kite-crow interaction.



## A Study on the Wetlands and Waterfowl of Gauhati University Campus

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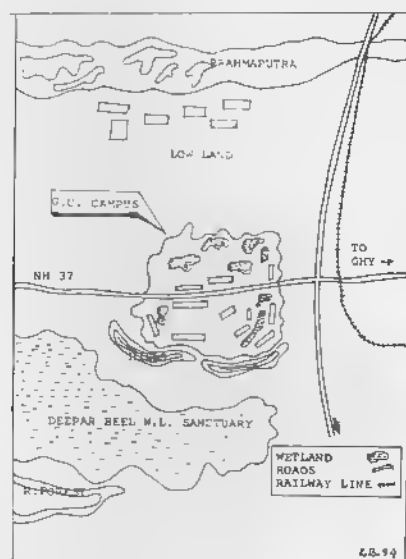
The Gauhati University campus is unique with its ideal location between the mighty Brahmaputra and the Deepar Beel Wildlife Sanctuary. One fine morning when the author and some friends were out for a walk, we observed a white-breasted waterhen feeding its nestlings which were following their mother in a small wetland within the campus. This sight stimulated our interest in birds.

The campus is full of water bodies with a high potentiality for residential as well as migratory species. In spite of human and traffic disturbance surprisingly the site remains suitable for water birds and they seem to survive with comfort. Though on the surface the different wetland areas appear to be more or less similar, within them some species specificity is being observed. Some wetlands are used as a feeding ground, others for reproduction, and some for both purposes. Most of the wetlands become dry in summer and some wetlands are used for paddy cultivation.

The hydrophytes identified in the campus are : *Eichornia crassipes*, *Pistia stratiotis*, *Nymphaea alba*, *Nymphaea rubra*, *Lemna minor*, *Valisneria spiralis*, *Hydrilla verticillata*, *Ipomea repans*, *Azolla pinnate*, *Trapa bispinosa*, *Limnophila aquatica*, *Sagittaria segittifolia*, *Utricularia flexuosa*, *Hymanachanae* sp., *Scripus* sp., *Salvinia* sp., *Ceratophyllum* sp., *Jussieu* sp. and *Spirodella polyrrhiza*. The dominant plankton recorded in the wetlands of the campus are *Cyclops*, *Bosmina*, *Brachionus*, *Keratela*, *Volvox*, *Anacystis* and *Oscillatoria*.

In the various wetlands within the University Campus the following water birds were recorded :

Sl. No.	Common Name	Scientific Name	Comments
01	Bronze-winged jacana	<i>Metopidius indicus</i>	B,C
02	Pheasant-tailed jacana	<i>Hydrophasianus chirurgus</i>	R
03	White-breasted waterhen	<i>Amaurornis phoenicurus</i>	B,C
04	Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropsis</i>	B,C
05	Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	B,R



Locational Map of Gauhati University Campus (Not to Scale)

06	Little cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax niger</i>	C
07	Indian pond heron	<i>Ardeola grayii</i>	A
08	Little egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	C
09	Large egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	C
10	Night heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	R
11	Chestnut bittern	<i>Ixobrychus cinnamomeus</i>	B,R
12	Lesser adjutant stork	<i>Leptoptilos javanicus</i>	C
13	Lesser whistling teal	<i>Dendrocygna javanica</i>	B,A
14	Cotton teal	<i>Nettapus coromandelianus</i>	R
15	Red-wattled lapwing	<i>Vanellus indicus</i>	B,R

(Abbreviations used : A - abundant, B - breeding recorded, C - common, R - rare)





I was able to spend six days at Vazhachal Reserve Forest (Thrissur Dt., Kerala) during the last week of December '93 and observed certain interesting but puzzling aspects of the behaviour of some birds.

The immediate environs of our quarters were mostly covered by teak plantations, highly degraded secondary jungle and a small remnant riparian stretch fringing the river. Here by the river-side stood a large Irul (*Xylia xylocarpa*) tree, the canopy of which was covered, more or less completely by a climber in bloom. On this were perched four purple sunbirds *Nectarinia asiatica*, three males in eclipse plumage and a female, all assiduously launching aerial sallies to catch insects which were swarming near the blossoms. The modus operandi was exactly like that of the true flycatchers *Muscicapa* genus and the sunbirds seemed nearly as dexterous as the former. I was able to watch this strange behaviour on three consecutive mornings from about 7 am to 8 am. Sometimes a pair of Loten's sunbird *N. lotentia* and a few purple-rumped sunbirds *N. zeylanica* also joined the purple sunbirds. The whole scene was very noisy, the birds chattering excitedly, some times chasing one another. The remarkable fact was that during the whole time I watched them, not even once were they seen to probe the flowers for their more conventional food, nectar, while the insects were undoubtedly attracted by it. Is this habit of sunbirds a commonly seen one?

All over the surrounding jungle red silk cotton trees *Salmalia malabarica* were in full bloom drawing large masses of birds, beasts and insects. Every tree had an impressive but bewildering assemblage of racket tailed, bronzed and ashy drongos, Jerdon's and gold-fronted chloropsis, common and hill mynas, Indian and white bellied tree-pies, blue-winged and blossom-headed parakeets, jungle babblers, fairy blue birds, minivets, sunbirds, lorikeets and even house crows which had gathered to gorge themselves on the nectar. It was breath-taking to watch this teeming throng of bird life variously attired in dazzling colours flying and frolicking amidst the coral red blossoms of the defoliated salmalia trees. Even bonnet macaques *Macaca radiata* and giant squirrels *Ratufa indica* were seen feasting along with the birds in apparent harmony. Malabar grey hornbills, white-bellied tree-pies, blue-winged parakeets and blossom-headed parakeets were observed to tear apart and consume the fleshy petals of the flowers. Are flower petals a regular item in the diet of these birds? Interestingly some predominantly insectivorous birds like chestnut-headed bee-eater, pygmy woodpecker and heart-spotted woodpecker were observed probing the corolla. I could not be sure of their intentions in this regard. Were they in search of nectar or insects? I have no previous experience of watching birds assembled in *Salmalia* or for that matter other flowering trees. This time too I could spend only a small amount of time doing so. Hence the reticence in arriving at conclusions. But doubtlessly a *Salmalia* in flower is a veritable haven not only for a multitude of birds but also for a bird lover of the more

## Some Random Observations

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sedentary type who likes to watch them without tramping around too much! Many new facts regarding feeding habits, inter-specific interactions and other interesting aspects of ethology can be observed easily if one has time to spare and patience to stay put.

Heart-spotted woodpeckers *Hemicircus canente* are not particularly common around the forests of Trivandrum with which I am somewhat familiar, but at Vazhachal they were encountered quite a few times. Almost always they were noted clambering about in venteak trees *Lagerstroemia lanceolata* aptly called 'naked maiden of the forest' having the characteristic white bark which had started peeling at this time of the year. They seemed to be present wherever there were *Lagerstroemia* trees. A few hours of observation seems hardly enough even to hazard a guess regarding likes and dislikes of a bird and I wonder whether this observation is a purely co-incidental one; or does the heart-spotted woodpeckers have an affinity to *Lagerstroemia* trees?

Every morning and evening on all days I stayed here I observed a grey headed fishing eagle (*Ichthyophaga ichthyaeus*) which frequented a wide and calm stretch of the river. Most of the time it was seen perching nonchalantly, some times preening, on a tall tree by the bridge where it was notoriously difficult to spot if in spite of its large size and white belly. A loud screaming call was uttered mostly in the morning. One morning after devouring a fish, it flapped down heavily on a jutting piece of rock in the river and bending down took a beakful of water which it swallowed by throwing the head back. After some beakfuls which obviously quenched its thirst, it flew up to the favourite perch and started preening. A little west of the bridge in the river there were a few dense and spreading clumps of small trees *Madhuca nerifolia* which had branches overhanging the river. These were just about 7 ft above the river surface and it was here that the eagle roosted at night. There was a similar clump just to the right of it and this was utilised by a crested serpent eagle (*Spilornis cheela*) as its roosting place. After our evening bath in the river, my companions and I would sit on the bank opposite the trees and wait for the eagles to arrive. At about 6.45 pm, the serpent eagle would come sailing by the river course and taking a graceful upward swoop alight amidst the tangled branches after which it remained invisible. Later, when almost dark the fishing eagle too would fly down from its high perch to settle in its night time retreat. It was nice to see these two magnificent but different species of raptors roosting so close to each other. This was the first time that I saw a forest haunting raptor species roosting and it seemed incredible that such a lover of heights and vast skies as the serpent eagle would choose a roost so low down and that too over running water - such are the mysterious ways of animals and birds which man cannot always unravel. Anyway some of the readers might be able to provide answers to some of the doubts mentioned.





## A Peoples' Sanctuary for Blacknecked Crane

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ON a wintry evening five important people met in one of the remote Himalayan valleys in India. Two of them were village elders, guardians of their respective villages; one the headmaster of a village school together with his teacher colleague and the last a government official, deputy director of the sheep breeding farm in the valley. I was present there as co-ordinator and student of cranes, in particular blacknecked cranes, that came to the valley every winter.

We were soon joined by a retired Admiral, a representative of the armed forces of India (and a keen wildlife lover himself), who curiously enough, were also taking a keen interest in blacknecked cranes. The valley where we met lay in the sensitive border region between India and China where the presence of this gun-toting community mattered a great deal. Their co-operation we thought, was necessary for the task before the meeting - the protection of blacknecked cranes and their habitat in the valley.

As coordinator, I explained the background to the assembled gentlemen. In the 1980s I was studying blacknecked cranes wintering in Bhutan which, as the crane flies is not very far to the west from this Himalayan region. The Apa Tani Valley where these cranes used to winter in the 1950s, lay east, again not far from the valley where we met. I did not believe that the whole Apa Tani crane flock was exterminated. Though a few could be killed, the rest must have shifted to some other suitable valley, I thought. I therefore, began a search in the region between Bhutan-India border and the Apa Tani Valley, a part of the Arunachal Pradesh State of India.

I had explored the habitats both in Bhutan and in India, which the blacknecked crane used in winter. In both the places cranes wintered in wide, open valleys giving them an excellent all-round view. They foraged in marshlands as well as agricultural fields, both wheat and rice, gleaning fallen grain left after the harvest. They roosted in shallow water in the marshes or on little, sandy islands in the midst of rushing Himalayan streams. I was therefore, looking for a wide, open valley, with marshy low-lands bordering a stream gurgling through sandy beds. In the Himalaya such a valley was bound to be cultivated completing the habitat complex essential for the wintering blacknecks.

On 15 February 1990 as our jeep trundled along a dirt track a broad valley suddenly opened before us as the vehicle turned a sharp corner. I immediately put my field glasses to the eyes and realized that the valley offered everything that I was looking for. My excitement mounted as I began minutely examining the wide, open fields bordering the stream that meandered through a sandy bed. And sure enough, I soon spotted the inevitable : a blacknecked crane pair quietly foraging in agricultural fields! We were overjoyed,

myself and the retired Admiral who accompanied me on this expedition. The armed forces were keenly awaiting the outcome of our forays in inaccessible places as they had logistically supported us. So was discovered the Sangti valley and its blacknecked cranes! A significant factor favourable to cranes was the Buddhist people of the valley, people who regard the crane auspicious and a good omen. In winter the blacknecked crane was thus rediscovered on Indian soil after an interval of almost 40 years.

In 1992 and 1993 we searched almost the entire State of Arunachal Pradesh piercing through dense, evergreen forests, to look into low-lying valleys veiled behind moist fogs and low clouds ; climbing over hairpin bends to reach high-altitude valleys amidst snowy peaks and speaking through interpreters to neolithic tribals who still remain hunter-gatherers. In a few places I did come across wide, open valleys but they lacked the other habitat components. In one or two valleys all the habitat components were in place, but the resident people were bent on killing everything that moved. At the end of our travels our conclusion was : Sangti valley now replaces Apa Tani valley as the only wintering place for blacknecked cranes in India. I concluded by telling the meeting that all the nature-lovers of India look to Sangti with joy and pride and expect the people of the valley to protect the crane and its habitat. The headmaster spoke next. He was observing the cranes and kept notes in my absence. He narrated how he enthused the children to observe cranes. Now his students kept record of their arrival and departure and their movements in the valley. The village-elders told that the cranes arrived every year only after the harvest and never damaged crops. In fact they believed if cranes did not come in a particular year, their crops suffered an onslaught of insects subsequently.

1992 was a case in point. That year I had not seen a single crane in Sangti. What could be the reason ? The teacher however, asserted that 6 cranes did come to Sangti in November 1991 but left early presumably because blasting for road construction began, which must have frightened them. "We cannot stop roads which are essential to link interior areas," he said.

"But we can definitely stop blasting as long as cranes stay in the valley," contended the headmaster. "In fact this is exactly what we did this year. I requested the road construction people not to use dynamite and they agreed to postpone it till the cranes leave," he added.

"The 1991-92 winter was dry also. There were no winter rains" said the village elders.

Even in 1994 the crane feeding area appeared to me rather dry. The low-lying wetland area in the valley was ted by seepage from the surrounding mountain slopes. If the slopes become barren the seepage will be affected. I had seen villagers cutting trees on these slopes. I decided to put this point before the meeting.



"Can we do something about the felling of trees on the slopes ?". I enquired and added, "because if the mountains become barren, the wetland in the valley will be finished".

"The entire village depends on the wood from these mountains. It is difficult to stop cutting trees", the village elders said.

"But at least we can start planting trees immediately," the headmaster said. "The elder boys are sent to cut down the trees. We should impress upon them the importance of preserving forests and planting trees," he further said.

"We must get the Forest Department to give us the saplings" the government official said. I was glad that the importance of preserving the wetland was at last driven home.

The meeting was coming to a close. But I sensed some uneasiness in the two village elders. I asked them if they had anything more to say.

"What, if the government tomorrow decides to declare this area as a sanctuary ? They will fence the area, stop cultivation and ask the people to shift," the elders said.

This was true. The legal status of a wildlife sanctuary can only be attained when the government takes the designated land in its own possession and resettles the people elsewhere. If people are shifted they will not be able to cultivate and there will be no harvest and no fallen grains. In the case of Sangti the occurrence of cranes and the traditional practices of cultivation and keeping lands fallow in winter appear to be inseparable. The crane and the man complement each other. In sustaining himself man indirectly offered sustenance to the crane and both recognized each other's interdependence. The cultivator was content to have only one crop and leave the fields to cranes thereafter.

Many enlightened government officials had recognised this complementarity between wildlife and traditional societies and in fact warned nature-lovers not to press for the legal status of a sanctuary if nature conservation can be achieved by unofficial means.

The meeting unanimously decided that a sanctuary in law was not necessary for the Sangti and its cranes. Cranes will be protected by the people for their own good. Sangti will be a peoples' sanctuary!

The five assembled gentlemen formed themselves into a committee, the Sangti Valley Blacknecked Crane Conservation Committee or SVBNCCC, under the chairmanship of the government official. He undertook to liaise with other government departments and seek their cooperation so that no dynamiting would take place during the cranes' sojourn in the valley. The village elders agreed to control tree-cutting and to encourage their people to plant trees on mountain slopes. The army agreed to guard against poaching and wanton killing of any wildlife. They even undertook to provide grains if any shortage of fallen grains was anticipated ever. The teachers felt happy when they received a packet of crane slides especially prepared by ICF, International Crane Foundation, USA, to spread the message of crane conservation.

The meeting ended on a happy note over a cup of tea and a group photograph. I was particularly glad to see the village elders going home with beaming faces.

That night in my dream I saw a flock of cranes circling the sky, putting out its gear to land and being welcomed by smiling children with bouquets of flowers.



## The Great White Pelican in Kutch, Gujarat

S.N. VARU, Temple Street, Junavas, Madhapur, Kutch, Gujarat 370 020 and  
J.K. TIWARI, Scientist 'A', B.N.H.S., Vil. Phulia - Chhari, Taluka - Nakhtrana, Dist. Kutch, Gujarat 370 665

The great white pelican *Pelecanus onocrotalus* is mainly a winter visitor to Pakistan (Sind, Baluchistan) and northern India. It is partly resident in Kutch. Ali (1960) observed for the first time breeding of the great white pelicans in the Great Rann of Kutch.

The district of Kutch (area 45,612 sq.km) out of which 20,720 sq.km consists of the Rann (vast sheet of shallow saline water which when dry turns into sun-baked salt flats). It stretches roughly from 22° to 24° N and 68 to 71° E. The district lies in a strategic position and streams of migratory birds (waders, waterfowl, landbirds, passage migrants and a huge number of common cranes (*Grus grus*) and great white pelicans traverse across it.

There are numerous wetlands in Kutch. Man-made reservoirs, dams, ponds, tanks etc and natural water bodies

of which both the Ranns Little and Great are unique.

Banni grasslands have a chain of low-lying natural depressions which get filled with water after a good monsoon. The size of such wetlands vary from a small ditch to a huge wetland like Chhari-Dhand area (80 sq.km). The life of such seasonal wetlands depends on the rainfall received that particular year. These wetlands are generally shallow maximum depth 2-meters provide nutrient rich habitat for aquatic birds. Chhari-Dhand and others are very important for the great white pelicans. We have even sighted Dalmatian pelicans (*Pelecanus philippensis*) in the first two wetlands of Banni.

The first author of this note is a resident-birdwatcher actively birding since last 25 years in Kutch. Data on two decades of pelican sighting have been used in this note. The second author a Bombay Natural History Society Scientist working in Banni grassland since January 1990, in

Bird migration project and on the Grassland Ecology Project, has collected over 41/2 years data on Great white pelican sightings in Kutch.

The great white pelicans observed wintering in Pakistan and in India are birds certainly nesting in this area or in Lake Balkash breeding colonies, Kazakhstan. Crivelli et.al. (1991)

The four recoveries (3 by authors of this note) in Gujarat, (2-in Kutch, 1 at Rajkot and one in Gir forest) indicate that our great white pelican are from Lake Balkash, Kazakhstan. Varu & Khatri (1992), Tiwari (1993).

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## ✦ Of Indian Bird Paintings by a Lady Gwillim, and related matters

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"All Art is but imitation of Nature (*Omnis ars naturae imitatio est.*)"

— SENECA, *Epistle to Lucilius*

The article by Subramanya (NLBW 34: 74-76, 1994) on Lady Elizabeth Gwillim (nee Symonds) and her obscure, but now accessible, "superb water-colour plates" of Indian birds, interested me a great deal. His article describes how his discovery of Lady Gwillim's bird paintings at the Blacker-Wood Library of McGill University in Montreal, Canada, shocked him out of his belief and made him sit up, looking at the year "1800-" ..... "marked next to her name" displayed on the computer screen. This year needs to be corrected to "1801-" from which year she and her husband Henry, newly appointed "as Judge of the Supreme Court of Madras", and "her sister, and two servants sailed to India." Subramanya also mentions the legendary American artist John James Audubon and how his works were done much later than Lady Gwillim's. Audubon's bird paintings are classics and I cannot understand why Subramanya finds some of his works "dramatized" and "over-theatrical", even if admittedly artistic! Subramanya quotes the Canadian artist Terry Shortt's assessment of Lady Gwillim's works as "all were done from life and represent the finest portrayals of birds done up to her time". Incidentally, he mentions in passing that Terry Shortt "has spent considerable time in India", and it would be useful if he told us all what exactly this Canadian bird artist actually did here.

I believe there is reason for me to provide a proper perspective on the history of bird paintings here. I am unable to understand Subramanya's noticeable exuberance and a curious disbelief in the time period when Lady Gwillim's artwork was done in India. James Fisher, the famous British ornithologist (on whose books I grew up in the 1960s), has documented in the first three chapters of his book, *A HISTORY OF BIRDS* (1954, Hutchinson's University Library, London, 205 pp.), the story of bird writings and illustrations. He writes of figures of "a beautiful crane or heron" on the walls of "One Pyrenean cave, Gargas" that may have been

drawn some 17,000 to 18,000 years ago at the time of the Aurignacian civilization, and "is thus probably the oldest bird record". Fisher also mentions the woodcut of a brown owl by Albrecht Durer in 1508 and "Thomas Bewick's great picture-book, *A History of British Birds*, which began to come out in Newcastle-upon-Tyne in 1797". Back home, in India, T.C. Jerdon (1862, *THE BIRDS OF INDIA* 1: xliii-xliv) gave a summary of the illustrated works, by then published, of Indian birds, and Norman Kinnear's (1952, *JBNHS* 51: 104-110) paper on the history of Indian Ornithology cites many such works where bird paintings were published, not just created, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This extract from his paper seems eminently pertinent here - "In the latter part of the eighteenth century taxidermy was still in its infancy and instead of making a collection of stuffed birds it was the custom in India to employ a native artist to make paintings of birds. Many collections of such paintings were made and some became famous because Latham saw them and described the birds in his works. Among these collections was that made by Lady Impey, the wife of the Chief Justice of Bengal in the time of Warren Hastings [ what a wonderful coincidence with Lady Gwillim, wife of the Supreme Court Judge of Madras! - K.G.], and there was another, made by a later Chief Justice, Sir John Anstruther. The collection of Lord Mountmorris included both African and Indian birds, but by far the largest was the one made by Major-General Hardwick chiefly in the 'Upper Provinces of Hindustan'. Latham, however, did not have the opportunity of examining any or Dr. Buchanan's drawings which were referred to under the section on Mammals [1952, *JBNHS* 50:766-778].....Hardwick, in addition to employing a native artist to paint birds also had a shikari to shoot and preserve specimens .... when Hardwick went home on leave in 1802 he took with him all his drawings and note books and, on his return to India in 1806, he left his mammal and bird drawings in England but took with him his note books and drawings of insects, intending to work at them on the voyage. Unfortunately the ship he was on foundered when six days out from Plymouth and he lost everything".

Lady Gwillim therefore, was only one talented individual bird artist among several that existed at or even before her time in India or outside, including many "natives", meaning Indians. In any case, Subramanya's discovery and report of Lady Elizabeth Gwillim's "extremely lifelike, scientifically accurate and very artistic" bird portraits, is welcome and deserving of the gratitude of Indian ornithologists. However, I would like to know if her paintings carried any names whatsoever of each of the 100-plus bird species in Subramanya's list (NLBW 34: 75-76, 1994)? If not, did Subramanya identify all the birds on the 121 water-colour plates himself? Unfortunately, his list is difficult to use and is riddled with some factual and typographical errors as well. The Kestrel (No.1) has its scientific name omitted, for a start (but finds it as No.66), and there is no method in the presentation of the list, harriers being numbered 14 & 15 and then again 61 to 64, vultures jumping from numbers 6 & 7 to 59 & 60, *ad nauseum*. The scientific names given are also sloppy; for instance, from when did the Indian robin (Nos 105 & 107 share the same genus name with the pied bush chat (No.106)? A little more care and effort by the author, editor and printer/publisher would have avoided such errors and made the list accurate and easier to use, especially if the birds illustrated were listed in the order of Ripley, used in the INDIAN HANDBOOK, COMPACT HANDBOOK, PICTORIAL GUIDE and in the OLD and NEW SYNOPSIS. If, instead of serial numbers, the SYNOPSIS numbers are given against each English ("Common") name of every bird species listed, they would serve readers well. The appropriate species scientific names and all other available data required could then be obtained by the reader through recourse to the

above mentioned reference books. Whatever English bird name is used, citation of the SYNOPSIS number would be adopting a standard "code" already available and therefore simplifying usage and providing a foolproof workable system for Indian birdwatchers.

Another matter that nags me is a little information on from where Lady Gwillim got her avian "models" to paint? If she was located only in Madras, there are a few birds like the Red junglefowl (No.30), the greater adjutant stork (No.39), crested wood partridge (No.94) which are *extralimital*, and which could only have been observed or obtained from elsewhere. If her paintings were done from *live* birds, perhaps trapped and caged birds were obtained from the bird market and used by her? It is unfortunate that she gave no indication (?) which birds were those seen by her in Madras, because this would have been useful record for the city, supplementing those of Edward Buckley (1713) to Thomas Jerdon (1839-1864) to Douglas Dewar (1905) and later observers. Perhaps Subramanya could tell us if the staff of the Blacker-Wood Library in Montreal have more information stored on Lady Gwillim's time and work (writings?) in Madras? If not, would contacting the Librarian there help?

Finally, Subramanya writes that of the 164 paintings found and purchased by Casey Wood from an antique store in London, one was of an "alligator". If Lady Gwillim's work was done only in India (and earlier in England?), the painting in question must have been of a crocodile, since to my knowledge alligators exist only in the New World (the "Americas").



## Discovery of a New Crane-Migration Route and the First Mid-winter Waterfowl Census in Arunachal Pradesh

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The study of bird-migration is always fascinating and whenever I get an opportunity I try to do a bit in my study area, i.e., North-East India. This remote area of India is very important from the ornithological point of view because a lot of migratory waterfowl use this region during their seasonal migration, moreover this is also among the least studied areas of Asia.

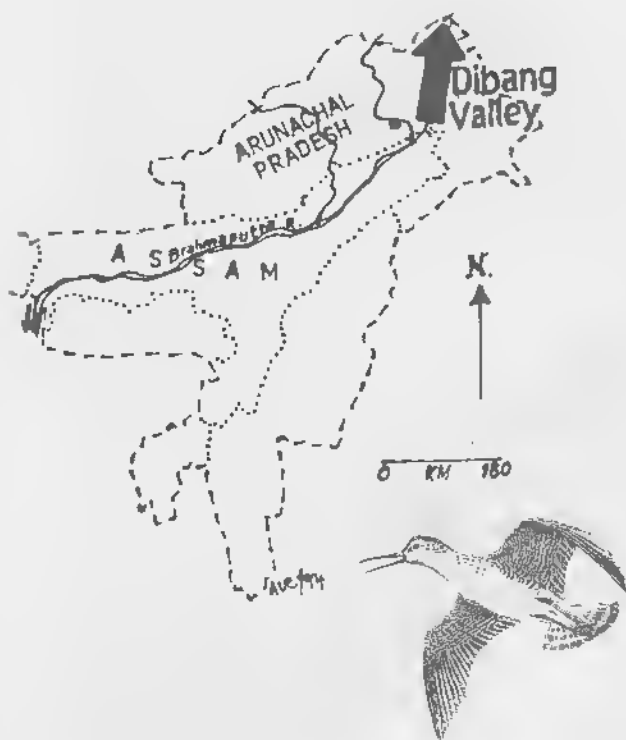
During 1989-91, I observed some migration along the Siang (upper reaches of the Brahmaputra) and the Subansiri rivers. Both these trans-Himalayan rivers are known flyways of wintering waterfowl. I presumed that similar migration occurs along the Manas and the Jia-Bhareli rivers. I was anxious to find out if the birds use the Dibang and the Lohit, both major rivers, during migration. After the Siang, the Dibang is the biggest river (in its lower reaches, the braided river-bed is 7 to 8 km wide) and also provides a direct outlet to the migrants flying to/from north-east, i.e., south-eastern Tibet, other areas of eastern and northern China, and eastern Siberia.

On 6th March, 1993, I arrived at Dambuk, a place located between the Siang and the Dibang rivers. On arrival, I was

informed that ducks and geese in hundreds were flying towards the north every day. On the 7th morning, I left for the river-bank, c.8. km east of Dambuk, called Nizamghat. I arrived at the spot at 8.45 am, and started trekking along the bouldery river-bed interspersed with grassy *Chapories* (sandy and grassy islets and tracts). At Nizamghat, the Dibang river debouches into the plains, from c. 250-300 m width between the hills to at least 6 km in the plains.

At 9.15 am suddenly the area became alive with *kroonk*, *kroonk* sounds. I turned around and to my surprise, saw a huge flock of common cranes *Grus grus* taking off from a grassy *Chapori*. They were circling and flying towards the north. I photographed the flock and then from enlarged transparencies counted 522! Such a large flock of common cranes is unexpected in this part of the Indian Sub-Continent. The cranes were resting in the *Chapori* in the grass hence I could not see them till they took off when thermals were available.

More surprises were awaiting me again as at 9.35 am, I heard *kroonk*, *kroonk* sounds from the south. This time, a smaller flock coming from the south were flying directly towards the north. I again photographed the flock and then



counted 156. While the first flock did not maintain any "V" shaped formation in flight, the second one maintained it. Moreover the second group flew directly across the Mishmi Hills. The first group on the other hand again circled when very near to the hill-face c. 2000 m high.

An interesting phenomenon was observed when the first group started circling near the hill-face. Some 7-8 cranes of the first group left the flock and flew towards the south, from which direction the second group was coming. However, when they came near the second group, although they also turned towards the north, they did not join the flock and followed them as a separate group. The motive behind this split of 7-8 cranes could not be understood. The elevation of the river-bed near Nizamghat is c. 200 m above mean sea level (28° 16'N & 95° 42' E).

The occurrence of such a large number of common cranes in this part of India was unheard of. *Grus grus* was regarded as a straggler or very rare winter visitor to North East India. Only a handful of records exist of small groups in Cachar and Lakhimpur. However, subsequent studies revealed that it is a regular but rare winter visitor to Assam. Till 1992, I recorded it in Sibsagar district (Feb 1988), Jorhat district including Majuti (Jan. & Feb., 1991) and Lakhimpur district (Mar., 1991). In 1993, I saw common cranes near Dhola in Tinsukia district. There I observed the cranes, a flock of 19, on 23 and 25 February, and 6 March. The locals told me that this flock was there almost throughout the latter half of February and the first week of March (perhaps up to 6th). On my return from Dambuk on 10th March, I did not see

the cranes. In all probability they have joined the 'Big flocks' which flew away on 7 March across the Mishmi Hills.

The following inferences can be drawn from these observation :

1. A new migration-route of the common crane discovered. All the known routes are through North-Western India via Pakistan and Afghanistan.
2. The Dibang river is an important flyway of migratory waterfowl including the common crane.
3. A large number of common cranes enter the Indian Sub-continent through the north-east and are in all probability from eastern Siberia. The known populations mostly from western Siberia may also be from eastern Europe.
4. Earlier it was believed that the common crane enters India only through the north-west and then disperse towards east and south and often straggling into Assam. But now it is clear that some disperse from the north-east including Assam.
5. Since such a large population of common crane is unheard of in Assam and North-East India, and also unlikely to reside here, it is possible that the cranes wintering in eastern India including West Bengal, and Bangladesh use this route during migration.
6. The cranes use different areas of Upper Assam for congregation and finally use the *Chaporis* of the Dibang river as a last stop over before flying away to their summer grounds.
7. This is the first record of the common crane in Arunachal Pradesh.

#### Mid-Winter Waterfowl Census in Arunachal Pradesh

To bring Namdapha National Park of Arunachal Pradesh within the "map of waterfowl count", I made a day's visit on 16 January, 1993. Although I had visited the area on an earlier occasion the waterfowl count could not be made. The park covers 1985 sq km and is the basin of the Noa-Dihing river, which ultimately drains into the Brahmaputra. The range of elevation around Namdapha is very great, from 200m near M'pen to 4500m at Dapha Bum peak.

Because of the hilly terrain, the area is rich in hill birds. A few waterfowls are met with along the Noa-Dihing river and some of its tributaries like the Deban and Namdapha. Namdapha as well as Arunachal Pradesh have not yet been covered by this count which as is well known is carried out simultaneously in many parts of the world.

As expected, in a foothills country with bouldery and fast flowing rivers and streams, the number of waterfowl is insignificant. But a few interesting observations were made. These included sightings of the ibisbill *Ibidorhynchos struthersii*, great blackheaded gull *Larus ichthyaetus* and the great white-bellied or imperial heron *Ardea insignis/imperialis*.

A lone ibisbill was spotted on the boulders of the Noa-Dihing river (near its confluence with the Deban river). This was the first record of this bird in the south bank of the

Brahmaputra river. Earlier it was known only from the north bank of the Brahmaputra (Ali & Ripley, 1983).

One adult and then an immature of the great blackheaded gull were seen in flight over the Noa-Dihing river. This was the second sight record of the species in Arunachal Pradesh. The first being the ones I saw in D'Ering (Lali) Wildlife Sanctuary in March, 1991 (Choudhury, 1992)

The sighting of the great whitebellied heron was a matter of luck. For Namdapha as well as for the whole of Arunachal Pradesh, this was the first sighting/record of the species. I saw the bird in flight with slow wing-beat. It then settled in the densely-forested hill-slope. I do not know whether it settled on a tree or a nullah.

I covered only a tiny fraction of the national park (the Noa-Dihing river-stretch from Deban to M'pen). In other stretches of the river and in the jungle pools some more waterfowl are found to exist. It may be noted here that the rare whitewinged wood duck *Cairina scutulata* is also found in Namdapha. Other water-birds seen/counted were large, or great, cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*; little egret *Egretta garzetta*; goosander *Mergus merganser*; river, or spurwinged, lapwing *Vanellus duvaucelii* and some unidentified shore-birds.

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*There are excellent illustrations of the IBISBILL and the IMPERIAL HERON and the other birds referred to in this article in 'A Field Guide to the WATER BIRDS of ASIA. This splendid guide is available at a very reasonable price and the illustrations are a joy to see and a great aid to identification.*

— Editor

#### CORRESPONDENCE

##### METTUPALAYAM ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY (MOS).

DR. S. THIRUMURTHI, Forest College & Research Institute, Mettupalayam 641 301, Tamil Nadu

An Ornithological Society, Mettupalayam Ornithological Society (MOS) is functioning from the Forest College and Research Institute, Mettupalayam, Tamilnadu. The MOS will work in close association with the Ornithological Society of India (OSI). The main aim of the MOS is to popularise ornithology as a science and birdwatching as a rewarding hobby among the students and youth. The society will also work for the conservation of birds by educating the people on the relative importance of birds to human life.

The MOS also proposes to undertake studies for the conservation of avian fauna of the Nilgiris. The priorities will be the effect of plantation and horticultural operations on the bird diversity in the hill district, impact of industrial pollution on birds and distribution of avian species with reference to altitude and forest types in the Nilgiris. Interested fellow ornithologists planning to visit the area are requested to

contact Prof. R. Jambulingam, Professor of Forestry or Dr. S. Thirumurthi, Entomologist, Forest College and Research Institute, Mettupalayam 641 301, Tamilnadu for further information and assistance.



##### GREEN SANDPIPER WETTING A DRY FISH and SWALLOWING IT. ANWARKHAN BABI and DILHAS JAFFRI, Tanvir Manzil, Dholka 387 810 (Gujarat)

On the 14th of October 1994 I was lucky to make an interesting observation. A green sandpiper picked up a small dry fish, about two inches and wetted it in the river before calmly swallowing it. To complete the proceedings it took a few gulps of water and then went about its business happily.



##### NESTING OF SHORT-TOED EAGLE IN KUTCH. J.K. TIWARI

Short-toed Eagle *Circaetus gallicus* is resident and uncommon in Kutch. A widely distributed eagle of Indian Plains.

On 11 February 1994, I saw one nest of short-toed eagle in a Scrub forest on *Acacia nilotica* tree near Dhora village, on the edge of Banni grassland. The surrounding country was rugged and stony. The nesting details are as under.

Nest height = 16 ft.

Nesting tree = *Acacia nilotica*

Tree ht = 20 ft.

Nest shape = Twice as big as house crow's nest, a depression in the middle, lined by grasses.

Nest stage - 1-white egg on 11.2.94. We visited the nest several times after that and kept a watch on the nest. On 14 April 1994, when the chick was about 40-45 days old, we ringed it with L-1808 (BNHS) ring, and took the measurements of bill & tarsus of the chick. Bill from skull, 43.5 mm, from cere = 37 mm. Tarsus 97 mm. Weight 2150 grams. We noticed one saw scaled viper *Echis carinatus* inside the nest. The snake was 50 cm long.

Since no nesting data was available for Kutch until the present one, it is worth reporting this nest.



##### VALLEY SCHOOL BIRDS. MANU PRASANNA, SANDILYA T., K.M. BELLIAPPA, VIVEK NITYANANDA, ROHIT GULATI and B.S. VITTAL, The Valley School, "Haridvanam", 17th kilometre, Kanakpura Road, Bangalore 560 062

Being students of the Valley School, we would like to report some interesting bird observations made here during our stay here in the school campus from July 1991 to November 1994.

Small Indian pratincole *Glareola lactea* were seen in March 1994 breeding along with Indian river terns and little ringed plovers. The first 2 nests were noticed on 16th March. By 20th March there were 8 nests (5 nests with 3 eggs each and 3 nests with 2 eggs). Also in the vicinity were 2 nests of

little ringed plover and 13 nests of the indian river tern. However on March 24th all the nests were robbed of their eggs by some local people. Incidentally this happens to be the first report of pratincoles breeding near Bangalore. Presently, we have approached the divisional forest officer and he has assured to give necessary protection to this tank in future.

A male blue chat *Erithacus brunneus* was seen on campus during the months of November to February 1992-93. A female was also seen on another side of the campus often in December. The blue chat was first seen in Bangalore in 1989 (Shyamal 1990). There have been only 2 subsequent sightings since then.

On a cloudy evening, at 5.15pm on 12th July 1994 a brown hawk owl *Ninox scutulata* was seen perched on a *Ficus bengalensis* tree. The large eyes, the heavily streaked throat and breast and overall hawk-like appearance confirmed its identity. This happens to be the first record of the brown hawk owl in Bangalore.

A pair of brown fish owl *Bubo zeylonensis* has been seen now and then since 23rd December 1993. The roosting site of the owls was located in the Badavanamarthi State Forest adjoining the school campus. Bones of toads and rodents along with numerous shells of crabs can be seen here. Interestingly it is more than 500m away from the nearest stream and almost a kilometer from the nearest tank. The brown fish owl is very rarely seen in Bangalore. The nest of a short-toed eagle *Circus gallicus* was also seen on the same day in the Badavanamarthi State Forest.

A group of 5 common grey hornbills *Tockus birostris* were seen often in the months of July-October 1993. There happen to be only 2 sightings of this species in Bangalore subsequent to 1977.

Among the other more notable sightings are :

Sightings of peregrine falcon *Falco peregrinus peregrinator* on 6th Feb. '92, chesnut bitterns *Ixobrychus cinnamomeus* in July '92, blackbellied tern on 6th May '92, chestrutheaded bee-eater on 5th November '94, blackbird *Turdus merula* in February '93, forest wagtail on 26th October '93 and common rosefinch *Carpodacus erythrinus* in November '91.

#### References

- Ali, Salim and Ripley, S.D. (1983) : Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan  
Birdwatchers' Field Club of Bangalore (1994) : Annotated Checklist of the Birds of Bangalore.



**ASIAN WATERFOWL CENSUS 1987-91.** FAIZAL PARISH, Asian Wetland Bureau, Institute of Advanced Studies, University of Malaya, Lembah Pantai, 59100 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

The Asian Waterfowl Census (AWC) is jointly coordinated by the Asian Wetland Bureau (AWB) and the International Waterfowl and Wetlands Research bureau (IWRB) in UK. General information on the AWC is provided on the information sheet accompanying this letter.

In 1992, a detailed analysis of the information collected during the first five years was undertaken. The aims of the analysis were to evaluate the quality of information obtained,

map distribution of species, collate count data to identify sites of international importance for waterbirds using the standard criteria of Ramsar Convention and to develop population estimates for several species of waterbirds in the region. The analysis and interpretation of this data has greatly benefitted from the expertise and experience of several persons across the region, and we are grateful to all their contributions.

These results have been compiled into a new publication entitled "Asian Waterfowl Census 1987-91 : Distribution and Status of Asian Waterfowl" that has just been produced by the AWB, IWRB and Norwegian Institute for Nature Research (NINA) with the kind financial assistance from the Japanese Fund for Global Environment through the IWRB-Japan Committee and the Loke Wan Tho Memorial Foundation. We are confident that this report marks a milestone in the field of waterbird monitoring and wetland conservation in the Asian region.

On behalf of the collaborating agencies, we are pleased to send you a complimentary copy of the report for your review and use. We are sure that this report will be of great interest and useful to you and your colleagues. We would be very grateful to receive your constructive comments on the report and a copy of your review.

As mentioned above, the census has served as a useful tool for identifying sites of potential international importance. Suitable conservation measures for these sites in your region need to be promoted along with efforts to popularize the census. We would greatly appreciate your help in this endeavour and look forward to your ideas in realizing this.



Please participate in Asian Mid-winter Waterfowl Census  
7th - 23rd January 1995

#### ASIAN WATERFOWL CENSUS - LETTER FROM TAEJ MUNDKUR. Programme Officer - Avifauna, AWB, Malaysia.

At long last we have been able to print the five year analysis and hope that it sets the stage for future activities. I hope that you will be able to review it for the Newsletter.

The report itself has turned out to be a costlier exercise than anticipated and information contained in it covers the entire region. Consequently, it is likely that all the participants of the AWC will not be able to afford a personal copy. In order that the information contained in the report can go out to this wider audience, I have proposed that we produce a series of short articles for the different countries, highlighting matters of national or local concern contained in the report. At this level, the most important information would be the list of sites of international importance. I have already drafted something and would like to send it to you for inclusion in a forthcoming issue of the Newsletter if you feel that it would be useful. Ideally if it is included before the end of the year, people will get an idea of minimum sites that they should target to cover if they would like to monitor the most important sites.

The 1994 AWC report is underway and we hope to have that out soon.





## ASIAN WATERFOWL CENSUS. FACT SHEET

The Asian Wetland Bureau (AWB) coordinates the Asian Waterfowl Census (AWC) jointly with the International Waterfowl and Wetlands Research Bureau (IWRB) in UK. The Asian Waterfowl Census runs parallel to other international census of waterbirds in Africa, Europe and America under the umbrella of the International Waterfowl Census (IWC).

The census has three major objectives :

- to obtain information on an annual basis of waterbird populations at wetlands in the region during the non-breeding period of most species (January), as a basis for evaluation of sites and monitoring of populations;
- to monitor on an annual basis the status and condition of wetlands; and
- to encourage a greater interest in waterbirds and wetlands amongst people, and thereby promote the conservation of wetlands and waterbirds in the region.

The AWC is an annual event and takes place once a year, during the second and third week of January. The census was initiated in 1987 in the Indian subcontinent, and has grown rapidly to cover over 32 countries in the region. The latest to join the census in 1992 were Australia and New Zealand, with the island of Western Samoa sending the first set of counts in 1994. The census has just successfully succeeded in entering the Pacific region as well.

The census is primarily carried out by volunteers from all walks of life; university and school staff and students, nature club members, amateur and professional ornithologists, government and non-governmental agencies related to forestry, wildlife or wetland conservation and others.

Sites covered during the census include rivers, lakes, reservoirs, tanks, swamps, coastal sites, mangrove and mudflats, reefs, sandy beaches, etc. Waterbirds counted during the census include all species of ducks, grebes, pelicans, storks, ibis and spoonbill, ducks and geese, cranes, rails, waders, gulls and terns, and raptors (birds of prey) normally associated with wetlands. Counts are entered onto standardized count forms.

Each country is normally coordinated by a volunteer national or regional coordinator who is responsible to send out count forms, liaise with participants and receive forms after the census, compile a short national report and forward it to the international coordinators (AWB or IWRB). In some large countries or where several hundred volunteers participate, such as India and Pakistan, more than one coordinator takes on this role. For a few countries, where information is only received in a few years and from few persons, no coordinators exist.

All information received from national coordinators and participants is computerized and stored in a central database that runs on a DBASE IV system held at the AWB headquarters. This data is compiled into an annual report, a complimentary copy of which is then sent to all the participants, key national and international agencies. In addition to annual reports, numerous articles and information are made available to interested parties.

To its credit, the AWC has been extremely successful in achieving its primary aims. As a result of the increased awareness, local people and governments are now setting about the conservation of important sites in almost every country. Information collected during the census finds its way into a variety of books, technical publications, reports and news items. It is also used by international agencies for drafting international agreements. The data has also been used in estimating populations of waterbirds.

For further information about the census and ways to contribute to it, kindly contact Your regional co-ordinator or, Dr. Taej Mundkur, International Coordinator, AWC at the AWB Headquarters.



## UNUSUAL BREEDING SITE OF INDIAN PEAFOWL. RAKESH VYAS, 2-P-22, Vigyan nagar, Kota 324 005

On the 26th October 1994, I was told that a female peafowl *Pavo cristatus* has nested on the 4th floor of a building in the busy Rampura area of Kota city. Inside the walled city this four floor house stands close to a patch of vegetation with few large trees. A large number of peafowl used to frequent Nayapura & Civil Lines area on the banks of Chambal river until about 1985, when we used to regularly see the family parties with chicks. Now the increased population pressure, traffic and disturbance have marginalised the birds, which still breed in isolated patches of vegetation on the banks of Chambal. Still due to the sentiments of the local populace, peafowl can be seen feeding and roaming in the residential areas. But this is the first report of the nesting of a peafowl *Pavo cristatus* on the roof of a inhabited building.

This peahen had selected a secluded corner on the roof of the staircase on the fourth floor. The five eggs laid by the female had hatched about 2 weeks before I came to know of this. In the meantime, the owner of the building got worried when one chick was killed by a cat and another one was found missing. Probably it slipped out of its safe heaven. Finally three chicks were shifted to local zoo.

It is a very rare happening, thus the need is felt to report this. Although Ali and Ripley in the Compact Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan report that rarely peafowl also breed on the thatched roofs of the houses in the villages. But fourth floor of a building in the bustling city centre has no comparison with village houses. The birds have immense capacity to adjust to the changes in their feeding, roosting and breeding areas provided complete protection is given to them. The peafowl are semiferall birds in most parts of Rajasthan. They are confident and non-wary, thus making them an easy meat for someone who disregards local sentiments and customs.



## GREAT INDIAN HORNBILLS. MIRZA YAWAR BAIG, 2-B, Castle Rock, 26, 1st Main Road, Jayamahar Extn., Bangalore 560 046

I was in the Anamallais (Valparai Taluk, Uralikkal Estate) recently and three of my friends reported to me that in Anali



Estate which is on the bank of the Parambikulam river very near the Manamboli Reservoir and power generation plant, large numbers of great indian hornbills have been seen congregating on a single tree "like some strange fruit". I have no idea if this behaviour is normal but thought it very interesting. Sadly I did not have the time to go and see it for myself but have three independant sightings from reliable people in support of this claim.

Anali is a coffee estate and the tree species there are *Macaranga indica*, *Erythrina*, *Mimusops elengi*, *Ficus bengalensis*, *religiosa* and *benjamina* and *Grevillea robusta* in addition to Arabica and Robusta Coffee.



**THE ORIENTAL BIRD CLUB.** TOBY SINCLAIR, C-274, Defence Colony, New Delhi 110 024

After some months of discussion, I have set up an Indian Chapter of The Oriental Bird Club. The prime aim of this is to enable people in India and Nepal to subscribe locally to the Journal and Forktail at a subsidised rate. The OBC Council in the UK has fixed the subscription at Rs. 350 rather than the UKL 12.50 (Rs.575) that it is in the UK.

I am enclosing a few forms and would be grateful if you could make an announcement in a future issue of the Newsletter for Birdwatchers. The payments should either be made by draft drawn on a Delhi Bank or include Rs.20 to cover outstation bank charges.



**NOMENCLATURE PROBLEMS.** JOSEPH GEORGE, 100, 5th 'A' Cross, HIG Colony, RMV II Stage, Bangalore 560 094.

This has reference to the remarks in the Editorial column of this issue of the Newsletter regarding common names of birds.

It might be a good idea to follow the pattern adopted by Pittie and Robertson in Nomenclature of Birds of the Indian Sub-continent. On page iii top we read : "In order to be consistent... we omit hyphens in the adjectival part of the common name and include them in the nominal part only to link words that are those of bird types, eg. Hawk-Owl."

I find that hyphen is also used both in the adjectival and nominal parts when the second word begins with the last letter of the first word, eg. White-eyed Buzzard, Eurasian Thick-knee.

One more point to note is that each word in a name begins with the upper case. How else will we know, for example, that Singing Lark is a species, not just any lark that sings. But more seriously, a species is a distinct entity which deserves to be denoted by a proper noun. This is the accepted practice.

Anyway I am glad you have decided that we should follow a uniform pattern.



## BOOK REVIEW

**BIRD CONSERVATION STRATEGIES FOR THE NINETIES AND BEYOND.** Edited by A. VERGHESE, S. SRIDHAR and A.K. CHAKRAVARTHY, Ornithological Society of India, Rs. 275. Reviewed by ARUN BHATIA, 'Dew Drop', 241, 4th Cross, 1st Block, Koramangala, Bangalore 560 034

Ornithology is a growing field in India and this compilation of papers reflects a heartening trend, because the contributors are from the east, west, north and southern parts of the country and they are mostly amateurs, but whose papers can do any professional journal proud.

Ornithological Society of India (OSI), formed just two years ago, had organised a seminar recently on the changing scenario of bird conservation and ecology and 1500 manuscript pages received by it had to be edited, as "there was overwhelming response to the seminar with a wealth of information on birds". The purpose of the book is to bring these enthusiastic amateurs "on to a common platform with foresters, environmentalists and policy makers to make bird conservation strategies operative". And hence, the title of the book.

"This book serves only as a medium of dissemination," say the editors. They recognise the varying standards of the contributions and candidly state, "many a times inferences are from inadequate observations and analysis, but we accept this." They express the hope that in future they can see more incisive studies on life histories, population dynamics, predator-prey models, resource and foraging models etc., from which precise conservation strategies can be drawn.

Fiftyfour papers are grouped in the first section on 'ecology and conservation' and 26 each in the 'biology and behaviour' and 'economic ornithology' sections. They vary in length from a quarter page to several but some have pi charts, maps, matrix tables and bibliography.

The topic range is quite wide as some titles will show; "Status, diversity and decline of waterbirds in Brahmaputra Valley, Assam", "Occurrence of *Ciconia episcopus* (white necked stork) in Kutch", "Birds of Anamalai Hills" "Two unusual nesting sites of the redvented bulbul", "Benefits of being attractive... fruit colour and animal dispersal", "Avian nesting and roosting on Eucalyptus trees in Punjab", "Pesticide hazards to non-target birds".

A paper that provides merriment is by V. Natarajan who considers the southern crow pheasant at Point Calimere, Tamil Nadu. Its vocalisation behaviour is described with advertising call ("coop, coop, coop", up to a maximum of 34 coops), bubbling water bottle call "kok, kok", snake like hissing calls, "tch-tru" calls, "quieehee" calls, and "skee-aw" calls.

The book is a catalyst to the bird conservation movement and will also be of use for research. Wild Bird Society of Japan gave financial support for the publication and the book is sure to be welcomed by overseas conservation organisations.

Source : Times of India, October 30, 1994

